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AUTHOR Fogarty, M. F.
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ABSTRACT

The historical review outlines the activities of the Queensland Itinerant Service from 1901-1930. The report begins with an account of the Service's first traveling teacher, Mr. Johnson, who in his first year of duty visited 103 homesteads that housed 113 families having 319 children of school age; of its peak period in 1921 when there were 18 teachers; and of its decline as correspondence schools began to replace itinerant teachers. Additional sections cover: mode of operation, modes of transport and equipment carried, quality of the men, physical hardships, a profile of the parents, satisfying the educational desires of outback parents, effectiveness of the service, indirect influences, and the Primary Correspondence School. (AH)

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By

M. F. Fogarty

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THE QUEENSLAND ITINERANT TEACHER SERVICE 1901-1930

M.F. Fogarty

Note: This paper is based on the research study, "The Queensland Itinerant Teacher Service 1901-1930: Its History, Mode of Operation and Contribution to Education Within the State," completed by the author in 1979. This was based entirely on primary sources, so a little caution relative to findings should be exercised.

ESTABLISHMENT

At the turn of the century, the Queensland Department for Public Instruction [1.] was attempting to provide education for all children up to the age of 12 years. However, they were not achieving their objective as there were a number of isolated families that could not be reached by any system of schools. In 1901, it was decided to trial a system of travelling teachers to overcome this obstacle.

Queensland's first Itinerant Teacher was a Mr. Johnson who, in his first year of duty, visited 103 homesteads that housed 113 families having 319 children of school age. His territory stretched from Hebel to Adavale and from Hungerford to Maranoa.

In 1907, two additional Itinerant Teachers were appointed, but because of the long distances they were required to travel, they were unable, in most cases, to visit a family more than once a year. It was held that if the system were to operate effectively, a minimum of four such visits should be made annually.

Nine additional teachers were appointed in 1909 bringing the total to twelve, and in the same year, the service changed from an experimental programme to an operational one. Details of its operation at that stage are listed below:

(a) total distance travelled 32,805 miles

(b) children visited -

once

	three times	89
	four times	64
	five times	8
	total	1,254
(c)	families visited for the first time	338

2.

REACHING A PEAK

Four more Itinerant Teachers were appointed in 1911 and in the following year, one more assumed duty. The total number was now seventeen.

World War II took its toll on the Service via its members enlisting for military duties and by 1916, the number of districts had fallen to twelve. However, with the cessation of the War, it was increased to sixteen in 1919.

The Itinerant Teachers Service reached the peak of its development in 1921. Details are listed below:

(a)	number of Itinerant Teachers	18
(b)	distance travelled	64,355 miles
(c)	number of families visited	875
(d)	children visited -	
	once	206
	twice	406
	three times	188
	four times	52
	five times	20
	six times	5
	seven times	1
	Total	1,889
(e)	average number of visits	2.3

3.

DECLINE

During this period, lessons by correspondence were being experimented with in New South Wales and Western Australia. In 1921, The Secretary for Public Instruction, Mr. J. Huxham, sent the Acting Chief Inspector, Mr. B. McKenna, to Sydney to study the scheme. The latter's report convinced the former that there was a future for tuition by correspondence in the State and in January 1922, a scheme became operational for those children who were so isolated that it was virtually impossible for Itinerant Teachers to reach them.

By the end of 1922, the number of active Itinerant Teacher Districts had been reduced to sixteen. By the end of 1924, the number of teachers had further declined to eleven. By 1930, only four districts had not been made redundant by the Primary Correspondence School.

The rapid decline of the Itinerant Teacher Service was counter-balanced by the rapid development of the Primary Correspondence School. By December 1929, seventy-six teachers were giving tuition by post to 4,308 children. [4.]

There was no mention of the Itinerant Teacher Service in the Report to Parliament [5.] by the Secretary for Public Instruction in 1932 and succeeding years.

MODE OF OPERATION

Though schooling was compulsory during this period, such compulsion did not apply to children accessible to the travelling teachers. The following is an extract from a letter written by the Under Secretary to a Mrs. Thomson:

> "I have to request you to be good enough to inform me whether you will undertake to see that your children carry out any reasonable instructions given by the Itinerant Teacher or whether you wish him to discontinue his visits." [6.]

Mr. D.E. McKenzie, Itinerant Teacher in the Winton District made the following comment in a letter to the Under Secretary:

> "I called on Mr. Cragg, ..., as instructed by the Department. He does not wish to have his children taught as they constantly suffer from bad eyes, and he thinks reading may make them worse." [7.]

During each visit, the Itinerant Teacher set out a programme of instruction for each child, corrected work done since the previous visit and gave tuition not only to the children, but to the adult supervisors who assisted them and made sure that they did their school work between visits. The role of "amateur teacher" was performed by neighbours, parents, elder children, managers' wives and daughters, governors and governesses, in fact, by anyone who was literate and willing to carry out the task.

The travelling teacher's approach to the children he visited was a kindly one, in fact, the Department insisted on it. In 1920, an Itinerant Teacher advised that he had refused to visit a particular family because the mother had objected to his caning her children for having done little or no work since his last visit. The following extract from the Department's reply clearly shows its attitude:

> "It is not considered advisable, even if it were lawful, that Itinerant Teachers should depend upon corporal punishment to support their authority. Their work lies mainly among bush children, who, it is hoped, look forward with pleasure to the teacher's visit, and whose cooperation should be gained by quite other means than by threat of infliction of corporal punishment". [8].

Each year, before commencing their rounds, Itinerant Teachers were required to forward to the Department a proposed programme for the year. This included the anticipated number of visits to each home, the time to be spent on each visit and the time that would be taken in travelling between homesteads. In addition, they had to supply a map of their district and a list of parents showing the numbers of their children, their places of abode and the distance of each home from the one previous to it.

Each week, the travelling teachers had to forward a diary of their week's activities. It was a requirement that they record and give reasons for any departure from their proposed programme of work. At the end of each school year, they had to submit an Annual Report summarising their activities for the year and commenting on the progress of the children visited.

MODES OF TRANSPORT AND EQUIPMENT CARRIED

In making their rounds, the Itinerant Teachers used various modes of transport. In the early years, the most popular form was the horse and buggy and towards the end of the era, the motor car and the motor cycle became popular means of conveyance. Others, for special purposes only, included horse-back, coach, train, bicycle, foot and motor cycle with sidecar. One even recorded on his sketch map a distance of 147 miles to be travelled by camel. [9].

The usual equipment carried included: a tent to sleep in while on the track (accommodation was normally provided in homesteads if the travelling teachers reached them before nightfall); a hurricane lantern; various school requisites including text-books, reading books, slates, copy books and so on; supplies of the "School Paper"; feed for horses in dry times (if horse and buggy used); extra gallons of petrol (if motor car or cycle used); bedding, food; and cooking utensils.

Itinerant teachers were permitted to employ a boy whose duty it was to assist with menial tasks such as packing, unpacking, feeding the horses and perhaps, cooking.

THE QUALITY OF THE MEN

Much of the success of the Service depended upon the devotion to duty and the quality of its employees. An advertisement for an Itinerant Teacher placed in a 1922 "Education Office Gazette" listed the following as desirable attributes for effectively fulfilling the office:

> "Applications for appointment to the position of an Itinerant Teacher are invited from teachers. Preference will be given to an applicant who is unmarried, and who can claim to have had some experience in the handling of horses and in bush craft generally." 11.

Mr. A.H. Barlow, the Secretary for Public Instruction, stated in 1908:

> "The success of the system will depend very largely upon the men chosen as teachers; they must be thoroughly trustworthy and possessed of tact and resource." 12.

The Queensland Archive Files give many examples of teachers working on holidays, weekends, and during vacations so that they could carry out their duties more effectively. If they worked during the mid-winter and Easter holidays, they were permitted to add the days worked to their mid-summer vacations. If they worked on Public Holidays and weekends, they were not paid nor were they permitted to add these to their mid-summer breaks.

Many repairs to buggies and cars which the teachers carried out themselves were done on holidays:

"During over 2 years, I have hardly lost seven days from car trouble, not because the car is any good but because I carry so many spares and tools and do most of the repairs in my own time and on Sundays." 13.

"Practically all my spare time is taken up with repair work." 14.

PHYSICAL HARDSHIPS

The work of the Itinerant Teachers was hampered by several hardships over which they had no control. Chief among these were the weather and the undeveloped nature of the country they traversed. Droughts and floods frequently prevented the travelling teachers from completing their rounds as planned.

In flooded conditions, the car was not an improvement on the horse, in fact, often its progress was more limited. It would seem that cars would have been more effective than buggies in drought conditions as supplies of petrol, unlike horse-feed, were not dependent upon good climatic conditions. This was true, but there was another important variable. During droughts, the roads deteriorated causing heavier wear and tear on cars, more frequent repairs and consequently greater loss of time.

Throughout this era, no effective solution to the problems of the weather and the harsh conditions of the outback were found. The work of these men was continually complicated by the physical hardships of the "bush".

PARENTS

The illiteracy of some of the parents they visited was a further difficulty encountered by these teachers, as was the lack of interest shown by others. Fortunately the latter type were in the minority. Some statements to this end made by travelling teachers were:

"This is a pitiful case, as the husband and wife are unable to help the children on account of neither being able to write or cipher." 15.

"These children, unfortunately, have no instructor; their father is unable to assist them as he is almost blind. They were at one time given a little instruction by the mother but she has now been dead for some time. A neighbour, five miles away, has promised to look after their work about once each week." 16.

"The parents take no interest whatever in this work." 17.

In cases where parents showed no interest in their children's education, apart from performing the role of "educational missionary", there was little the teacher could do.

Generally, outback parents did want schooling for their children. The Archive Files contain numerous examples of letters from parents requesting the Department for assistance in the education of their children.

SATISFYING THE EDUCATIONAL DESIRES OF OUTBACK PARENTS

In the annual reports made by Itinerant Teachers, there are numerous extracts that indicate the high regard with which the Service was held, for example:

> "The parents, and also the other people residing in my district, speak exceedingly well of the system and always urge the Teacher to remain longer to enable the children to gain as much knowledge as possible." 18.
>
> "The parents are loud in their praise of the system, the results of which have been extremely beneficial." 19.
>
> "The people of the district are very pleased with the system of Education but regret that the I.T. cannot visit the families more frequently." 20.

Indeed the major criticism of the service appears to have been that visits were not frequent enough.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SERVICE

Again in their annual reports, Itinerant Teachers have indicated on many occasions how they were able to effect improvements in the standard of education within their districts, for example:

> "It is remarkable to see a family in a lonely two-roomed hut; neither parent can read nor write; the children have been visited by an Itinerant Teacher in 1908; by me, this year. These children (two) can read well, and the elder one does the shopping - by post." 21.
>
> "In almost every case I have found marked improvement, and in no cases have I found children who have not benefited by visits of the teacher." 22.

The Secretary for Public Instruction stated in his report of 1928:

> "District inspectors, when opportunity offers, test the proficiency of pupils taught by these teachers, and their reports show that good work is being done." 23.

However, not all subjects were taught successfully. English, particularly reading and writing, was taught most effectively. Basic mathematics was reasonably well taught while more involved work was not so well done. History and geography met with the least success. This was due in large measure to the isolation and the limited experiences of these "bush" children.

The Secretary for Public Instruction, Mr. A.H. Barlow summed up the situation in his 1907 report to Parliament.

> "By this means the children are at least taught to read, to write and to cipher." 24.

As well, the teachers' visits were often a motivating force that prompted both supervisors and children to continue their work when they may have felt inclined to give up:

> "The visits of the Itinerant Teacher have enabled the parents to assume control of their children, and his visit is always in their minds." 25.

INDIRECT INFLUENCES

The influence that the Itinerant Teacher service had on children of school-age was a direct one, but it also had an indirect influence on the older children not of school age and on parents. This was most relevant to families that were illiterate or illeducated:

> "The benefits of the system do not stop at the children assisted by the teacher. These children are able to teach their parents and elder brothers and sisters." 26.

On their rounds, teachers were constantly on the look-out for the possibility of forming provisional schools. If they found the number of children necessary for the establishment of a school, they advised parents of the procedures to be followed in making the necessary application. As well, they advised the Department of the matter.

Besides contributing towards the general education of the children of isolated families, the Itinerant Teacher service also contributed towards the health of these children. They were responsible for checking the incidence of blight, a disease of the eye. They carried the necessary medicines and ointments to cure it and as well, they reported cases to the Department for Public Instruction. Other cases of ill health that they found on their rounds were also reported.

AND THE PRIMARY CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL

Tuition by mail replaced the travelling teachers because it offered a more effective and efficient system of bringing education to isolated families. Lessons by correspondence reached children living on islands and other children who were so isolated that the Itinerant Teacher could not reach them. The Primary Correspondence School put education within the grasp of all children in Queensland.

The major advantage that correspondence tuition had over the Itinerant Teacher service was that it offered an unbroken, week by week tuition. As well it offered a more comprehensive coverage of the "essential" subjects of the primary school curriculum.

The Primary Correspondence School met with rapid success, but its progress would not have been so smooth had the Itinerant Teachers Service never existed. Initially, travelling teachers brought a degree of literacy and numeracy to Queensland's outback, thus making it easier for tuition by mail to succeed. Correspondence lessons are of little worth if their recipients cannot read. The Itinerant Teacher Service had given its pupils a degree of proficiency in the basic subjects on which the Correspondence School was able to build and improve. As well, travelling teachers were able to convince many parents not interested in education that it was necessary. Generally, within their districts, they created a climate conducive towards education. Had it not been for these men, many parents would not have received lessons by post so favourably.

COMMENT

The major objective of this paper was to be informative - to describe what was perhaps a very interesting and colourful aspect of Queensland education. However, it is also clear that the Itinerant Teacher Service did play a significant role in the State's early educational history. It was far from a perfect system, but it did bring a degree of literacy and numeracy to a large number of isolated children and it "paved the way" for the Primary Correspondence School, a more sophisticated means of catering for this particular aspect of rural education.

RESOURCES:

1. The Department for Public Instruction was re-designated the Department of Education in the mid-1950's.

2. Queensland Parliament 1910 "34th Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1909", Queensland Parliamentary Papers 8.

3. Queensland Parliament 1922 "46th Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1921", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. Vol. 1:7.

4. Queensland Parliament 1930 "54th Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1929", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. Vol. 1:8.

5. Queensland Parliament 1932 "56th Report of the Public Instruction for the Year 1931", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. Vol. 1.

6. Queensland Archive File, "Itinerant Teacher Service, District 8 Correspondence 1920-1922".

7. ibid.

8. ibid.

9. Queensland Archive File, "Itinerant Teacher Service, Programmes of Work 1915-1916".

10. Queensland Parliament 1928 "52nd Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1929", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. Vol. 1:8.

11. Department for Public Instruction 1922 Education Office Gazette. February.

12. Queensland Parliament 1908 "32nd Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1907", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. 10.

13. District 8, op. cit.

14. ibid.

15. Queensland Parliament 1909 "33rd Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1908", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. 9.

16. ibid.

17. ibid.

18. 34th Report, op. cit.

19. Queensland Parliament 1911 "35th Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1910", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. 9.

20. Queensland Archive File, "Itinerant Teacher Service, The Annual Reports of the Itinerant Teachers for the Year 1914".

21. 34th Report, op. cit., 10.

22. ibid. 9.

23. 52nd Report, op. cit.

24. Queensland Parliament 1907 "31st Report of the Secretary for Public Instruction for the Year 1906", Queensland Parliamentary Papers. 10.